

Amendments to the Claim:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-5 (cancelled).

6 (currently amended). A Pfl defective mutant lactic acid bacterium selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus* species, ~~*Lactobacillus*~~ species, *Pediococcus* species, *Streptococcus* species and *Bifidobacterium* species, said bacterium having, relative to the wild-type strain from which it is derived, at least one of the following characteristics:

(i) essentially the same growth rate when cultivated under aerobic conditions in M17 medium,

(ii) a reduced growth rate or a reduced rate of acid production when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RSM),

(iii) essentially no production of formate under the anaerobic conditions of (ii),

(iv) a reduced production of ethanol or acetate under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RSM) and/or

(v) an increased production of at least one α -acetolactate-derived metabolite when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in RSM,

said mutant bacterium being obtainable by a method comprising the steps of

(1) providing a wild-type lactic acid bacterial strain having a functional Pfl gene, and selected from the group

consisting of *Lactococcus* species, ~~*Lactobacillus* species~~, *Pediococcus* species, *Streptococcus* species and *Bifidobacterium* species, which under aerobic conditions is not capable of growth in the absence of acetate in a medium not containing lipoic acid, but which is capable of growth in such medium under anaerobic conditions, and

(2) selecting from said wild-type strain a mutant which under said conditions essentially does not grow in the absence of acetate.

7 (original). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 6 which has a production of acetoin which is increased by at least 100%.

8 (cancelled).

9 (currently amended). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 30 & which is a *Lactococcus lactis*.

10 (original). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 9 which is selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* and *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* biovar *diacetylactis*.

11 (currently amended). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 10 which is selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN221 deposited under the accession No. DSM 11034, a strain ~~essentially~~ having the characteristics of DSM 11034, *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* biovar *diacetylactis* strain DN227 deposited under the accession No. DSM 11040 and a strain ~~essentially~~ having the characteristics of DSM 11040.

12-26 (cancelled).

27 (original). A lactic acid bacterial starter culture composition comprising a lactic acid bacterium of claim 6.

28-29 (cancelled).

30 (previously presented). The lactic acid bacterium of

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claim 6 which is a *Lactococcus* species.